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THOUGHTS

ON THE

DESIRABLENESS AND UTILITY

OF

Ladies Visiting

THE FEMALE WARDS

OF

HOSPITALS AND LUNATIC ASYLUMS.

BY CATHERINE CAPPE.

ORIGINAL.

LONDON;

1816.



THOUGHTS, &c.

THERE are certain salutary regulations in themselves so important, and in their results so extremely advantageous, that no one who has not attentively observed what does actually take place in real life could possibly imagine that the great desirableness of their being adopted could ever for a moment be called in question. But, however sanguine may have been our previous expectations, if we have attentively observed the baneful effects of obstinate prejudice on the minds of some; the influence of trifling interfering interests on those of others,—we shall be prepared to expect, that the claims of justice and humanity will often find it difficult to be heard. These observations, I apprehend, particularly apply to the debate still at issue, respecting the official appointment of females to visit the apartments allotted to those of their own sex, and to superintend their general treatment and behaviour, whether in Hospitals, or Lunatic Asylums.

But whatever might have been deemed the probability that a doubt upon so plain a subject could ever have arisen, yet as it has been found by experience, that such doubts have been expressed, and what is still more, that much opposition to the introduction of the practice has actually been made, both directly and indirectly, in various methods, and under different pretences, it is become desirable to discuss the question, as far as it can be done within small compass, in all its bearings; whether as the proposed regulation would respect the best interests of the institutions themselves, the good conduct of those employed in them as pupils, as female servants or nurses;—its probable salu-

tary influence on the friendly visitors, their respective families and connections ; and, though last, not least, on the minds of the afflicted sufferers themselves,—its powerful tendency to soothe and tranquillize them, and in various ways to contribute towards their present comfort and lasting benefit.

Among the many important improvements for the alleviation of human suffering which the mild benignant spirit of Christianity has introduced, that of the Establishment of Hospitals for the relief of bodily disease, and of Lunatic Asylums for the insane, take a foremost place.—Nor is it merely the comfort of the patients admitted into them, and the methods used for their recovery, that constitute their whole usefulness.—The opportunity afforded in these institutions for the more extensive cultivation and consequent improvement of medical science in its various branches for the common benefit of Society at large, together with the means of supplying a better medical education to young students previously to their taking upon them a profession in which may be involved much of the future usefulness and comfort of those who may hereafter consult and place confidence in them, are surely advantages, which are eventually of little less importance.

But highly useful in these various points of view as these institutions confessedly are, it is obvious that the extent of their utility must be measured by the care, integrity and propriety with which they are conducted ; and as all human establishments are liable to be perverted, it may perhaps be useful, although not the leading object of the present writer, to point out one or two of the causes from which abuses must of necessity arise.

And in the first place, the great and almost general evil of appointing Masters, Matrons or Managers, of whatever description, not because they are best fitted to fill the allotted

station, but for the purpose of supplying a comfortable subsistence to some distressed dependant or needy relative, or, to oblige some powerful friend or desirable connection with a vote, thus sacrificing the best interests of the institution, and the good of all who ought to be benefited by it, to the private emolument of an individual; who, however well disposed, may be wholly incompetent to the situation.

In the second place it is equally obvious, that if the Physicians or Surgeons who are appointed, however eminent in their profession, undertake the care of a much greater number of patients than they can regularly visit consistently with their private practice, many instances of great neglect must infallibly ensue.—But as these are evils which cannot be prevented or cured by those who have not the appointment of persons to fill these important offices, we shall hasten to the consideration of others, in respect to which female visitors might certainly be of considerable use.

But first, it may be expedient to enquire what will probably be the general character of the young men who attend these institutions for the purpose of medical improvement? Is it likely that they should, all of them, be remarkable for decency of conduct, and propriety of conversation and behaviour—for a uniform and steady observance of the salutary rules of christian morality, neither capable of seducing others, nor liable to be seduced themselves by licentious conversation, by the improper demeanour of a selfish unprincipled nurse, or by the opportunities sometimes unavoidably afforded in the course of their medical attendance; aided it may be, in some instances, by the unguarded behaviour of the unfortunate young persons entrusted to their care? Is not the resident Apothecary, who, from the trust reposed in him, and the power with which he is invested, must of necessity be considered as the master of the numerous family, generally a young unmarried

man?—Is it to be expected that he will always use his authority as a check upon the conduct of others? Is it not, on the contrary, highly desirable that there should, if possible, be some powerful restraint upon his own?

If it should be inquired how the appointment of lady visitors to the female wards could be expected to check those moral disorders which could be effectually prevented only by a previous careful education, together with a deep sense of duty to God as accountable beings, aided by an earnest solicitude on the part of all concerned, faithfully to fulfil the important trust reposed in them? It must in reply be admitted that although a strict adherence to christian principles of action is the only certain means of preventing every species of moral depravity, yet that something towards it might be done, and probably much more than is commonly apprehended, by the introduction of those general habits of order, and that sense of propriety and decency in conversation and behaviour, which the frequent visits of respectable ladies would have a powerful tendency to produce; especially if the patients were made aware, that as on the one hand they would be protected from insult, so on the other, their conduct as well as that of the nurses would be attentively observed, and that every expectation of future notice or patronage would entirely depend upon their present conduct. Some of the parties, it is admitted, being unwilling to relinquish a present sinful gratification, though it should assuredly lead to misery and wretchedness, might not quite relish so desirable a regulation, but would they therefore be the less indebted to the friendly hand that should kindly be stretched out to save them from infamy and remorse? But whatever might be their own, what in this view would be the feelings of the truly conscientious parent; would he be much less thankful for the preservation from vice of a beloved son, than for the moral rescue of an unprotected daughter? Would not every new regu-

lation which had this happy tendency be hailed by him as a blessing, whatever the licentious maxims of the profligate might affirm to the contrary?

There is one class of persons in particular, to whom the being preserved from vice is of the utmost consequence, not to themselves alone and to those in their own immediate station, but to many others who rank above them in Society in various gradations—namely, that of female servants.

How continually does it happen, especially in populous towns, that in case of an accident, or the attack of severe disease, an hospital is the only resource, and of what importance must it be to the family she serves, that she should return to them uncorrupted.

A lady visitor in an hospital or Asylum, should be to that institution what the kind judicious Mistress of a family is to her household,—the careful inspector of the œconomy, the integrity and the good moral conduct of the house-keeper and other inferior servants in their various departments. Are there not many things relating to cleanliness, proper clothing, and a thousand other less obvious matters of great consequence to the sick, into which a male visitor, from motives of delicacy, cannot inquire, and which, if there are no lady visitors, must be entirely left to the uncontrolled superintendence of the nurse or matron? Would the father, the brother, the son, however kind or intelligent, be equally competent to all the duties of a judicious inspector of a bed of sickness, as a mother, a sister, or a daughter? and do not the same principles apply in the one case as in the other? Surely then we need not add how exceedingly in every point of view a regulation so salutary would increase the general utility, and add to the credit and respectability of these several institutions, at the same time that the benefit would be unspeakable to all those for whose assistance they were originally designed.

If then it be admitted that the regular appointment of female visitors would in its results be so conducive to the general welfare and favorable to the moral character of others, may we not next inquire what would be the effects of this practice, were it to become general, upon their own?

It is well known that in a greater or less degree, all human beings are the children of habit, and that in proportion as the young are trained to the exercise of kindness and benevolence, taught to consider the happiness of others in common with their own, or exclusively to seek mere selfish gratifications, such will be their future character. Is this true of both sexes, or are females an exception to a general law? From whom would the father, the husband, the son, or the brother, expect the most judicious, affectionate attention in an hour of sickness or under the infirmities of age? from her who had been early accustomed to fulfil every relative and social duty, to "visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction," and had learnt from experience the soothing charm of affectionate sympathy; or from her whose valuable time had been principally squandered in the acquirement of mere showy accomplishments, or in studiously adorning her person that she might excite more general admiration, might figure with more distinguished eclat in the crowded nightly assembly, and run with increasing celebrity the unmeaning, unceasing round of fashionable dissipation?

What, we may inquire, would be the different feelings of the affectionate father of a numerous family, if he could rely, in the event of his being removed from them, upon the energy of their mother, early trained up in habits of active benevolent exertion; or were conscious, on the contrary, that in that event they would be forlorn and desolate, having no friendly hand to guide and direct their inexperienced steps?

But the female patients of these institutions, would they feel no repugnance to the idea of being visited by ladies? rather on the contrary, would they not consider it as a very great privilege to have the power of communicating to persons of their own sex every afflictive circumstance of their suffering state? May there not be a variety of minute circumstances which may occasion great distress, and may retard, if not wholly prevent, recovery, but which can be communicated only to a female ear? Would it not be an unspeakable comfort to be assured, that every species of unfeeling licentiousness would be repressed, and that if they demeaned themselves with modesty and propriety they might depend upon being countenanced by those friends of suffering humanity whilst they remained in the hospital, and occasionally perhaps, in cases of extreme distress, even beyond that period? Even the nurses, such of them at least as were solicitous to do their duty, would be gainers by having their conduct observed and approved; and in respect to them it is the more necessary and important that they should be superintended, as they are usually taken from the lowest classes of society, and as it is the unavoidable tendency of the habitual sight of human suffering to harden the heart against the feelings of compassion, especially if fatigued by long laborious attendance and want of rest. How soothing to an afflicted sufferer in such circumstances, to hear from an humane visitor the softened voice of tender sympathy! Nor are these considerations, not even the last, by any means inapplicable to persons laboring under the greatest of all human afflictions, that of insanity, for even these have their lucid intervals, and it often happens that the desire of obtaining esteem is never wholly obliterated even during their wildest paroxysms, and is productive of the most salutary effects to resist “the strong

irregular tendencies of their disease.”¹ How salutary then the sympathy expressed by the countenance and manner of a humane visitor! Nor is this all, for would it not be of unspeakable importance that the solitary hapless young female should be protected from insult in these gloomy abodes? —Let the annals of the prison-house faithfully given finally decide.

But with whom, it may be asked, if an opposition be yet made to a regulation so salutary, with whom does it originate? Is it from ladies themselves? Do they universally decline so painful an exertion? Do they shrink with apprehension lest their health should suffer from visiting the abodes of disease, or their nerves be too painfully affected by witnessing the distressing aberrations of insanity? For the honor of our sex and country it is well known that this is far from being universally the case; that there are many, who in the hope of doing good would willingly run the risk, and endeavour to overcome these terrific alarms. —With whom, then, for we must repeat the question, with whom does the opposition originate? Does it arise from persons of the other sex? The inquiry must then be made, on what principle, or from what motive it can proceed? Are these opposing gentlemen prepared to affirm that females, as such, are incapable of judging and acting with prudence and discretion? Before they are believed they must give their reasons, and produce their proofs. The assertion might indeed be true of the wretched, degraded, enslaved inhabitants of a Turkish harem, but will hardly obtain credit in these thrice happy regions, where His religion is professed who disdained not to honor many individuals of that sex with his friendship—who in their turn forsook him not when suspended on the cross, and whose fidelity

¹ See a most interesting account of the retreat near this City by Mr. Samuel Tuke p. 157, quarto edition.

he signally rewarded by condescending to appear first to them after his glorious resurrection from the Arimathean's tomb. And is it not an undoubted fact that even in those very countries where the gospel is most adulterated, the public hospitals and other charitable institutions are unspeakably benefited by the regular humane attendance of the female sex?

Are these opposers afraid, that were ladies in general to go on improving in mental and moral acquisitions—afraid, that in consequence of more extensive active benevolence, they should attain to yet more enlarged and accurate views of human life and christian duty, and consequently being more eminently distinguished for wise conduct and judicious discrimination, that their influence should be proportionably increased? The alarm is well founded, for trivial as may be the pursuits, and imperfect as may be the character of too many in our own age and country, (among the daughters of fashion more especially) yet it must be allowed, notwithstanding, that they take a much higher place already than their degraded, unfortunate contemporaries in Constantinople or Hindostan—and to what is this owing, but to their better education, and to their being allowed to consider themselves as rational and accountable creatures? Who then shall say to how much higher degrees of consideration and respectability they might eventually attain, were their minds still further enlarged and their consequent modes of life more consistent, rational and disinterestedly benevolent?

But enough, it is apprehended, has been said upon this subject; for if it is evident, that the institutions it especially respects—the medical students who attend; the nurses and servants; as well as the visitors themselves; their families and immediate connections; together with the various classes of afflicted sufferers—would all of them be essentially bene-

fited by the proposed arrangement, surely a doubt cannot remain of its extreme desirableness. And is it too much to hope, that its general utility being fully admitted, a plan for its proper regulation will speedily be proposed ; and that a practice so extensively salutary will eventually become general, not merely in these united kingdoms, but in America and wherever the Christian Name is known and respected ?

It may not be deemed wholly irrelevant to add, that the practice above recommended was adopted in the York County Hospital in the year 1814, and in the Lunatic Asylum in 1815, and has been attended in both institutions by very beneficial results. I shall mention a case or two of good effects produced in respect to patients leaving the Hospital, merely as a specimen.

Catharine Bartley, a poor Irish woman, who had resided some time with her husband at Newcastle, and accompanied him to this city to work in harvest, being taken extremely ill soon after they came, was deserted by him when he found that, instead of assisting, she became burdensome. She had been reduced to the sad necessity of pawning almost all her little wardrobe before she could procure a recommendation to the Hospital, where at length she was received in an almost dying state, and where, in a few weeks, by proper medicines and sufficient food, she was happily recovered. Whilst an inmate she had no means of paying for her washing, much less of redeeming her cloak and other necessaries from the pawnbroker, or of procuring any money to assist her on her meditated long journey to Ireland. This poor woman's behaviour in the Hospital had been extremely respectable, and her whole appearance and manner were very interesting ; and as it appeared that she was a Catholic, her forlorn situation was represented by the visitors to the ladies of the nunnery in this city, who kindly enabled her to get possession of her clothes, adding a few additional necessaries, and supplying her with a small sum

of money to assist her on the road. She repaid her benefactresses by many tears of gratitude, feelingly expressing in her own artless language, that this was the Lord's doing, who had wonderfully raised her up friends in a land of strangers.

Mary Errington, from Hadlon near Malton, aged 21, nearly deprived of the use of her limbs for the last six years, but retaining notwithstanding a very pleasing expression of countenance, and an uniform cheerfulness of temper. In addition to her obliging behaviour, she particularly attracted the attention of the visitors by her industry and willingness, whenever she was able, having happily been taught to read herself, (an acquirement not yet by any means so common as might be expected) to teach three other poor girls among the patients, who did not possess that advantage.—Unhappily her disease admitted not of relief, and after an abode of a few weeks, she was discharged as incurable.—Her father and mother came hither on foot, a distance of twenty miles, to devise the means of her returning home in safety. It appeared that she was the eldest of ten children, nine of whom were living, and that the parents had hitherto maintained them all without parish assistance; the father, Robert Errington, said, that by great care and industry they had been enabled to do this, with the aid of taking piecework as a husbandman, instead of daily wages. Being asked how he had contrived to have his children taught to read, he replied, that he had paid a school-master in the village two guineas annually for seven years, to teach all his children. On inquiring how they could get their daughter conveyed home, he said, that as she was unable to ride on horseback, or to bear the motion of a cart, he must be obliged to pay for her in the diligence, but without making any complaint of the expence or of the pecuniary embarrassment to which it would subject them—an embarrassment

however from which their new friends were happy, in part, to relieve them. He had a most open, honest countenance, which beamed with satisfaction on hearing the approbation expressed of their conduct ; and with thankfulness and gratitude for the sympathy his daughter's suffering state had excited.

The ladies who visit in these respective institutions are appointed by the Governors at a quarterly meeting, for the ensuing three months. They have a book, in which they note down any abuses they may have observed, to be shown from time to time to the Gentlemen's Committee. Their observations, in the Lunatic Asylum, extend to the apparel and cleanliness of the female patients as well as to their humane treatment and the decorous demeanour of the nurses and keepers. The unhappy sufferers generally express the greatest pleasure in being thus visited, and the strong compassion excited by seeing the human intellect thus laid low, gives an interest which generally absorbs every other feeling.

In the Asylum, any lady of respectability known to the Governors, and who is willing to become a visitor, may be appointed without being expected to subscribe to the institution.—A very equitable and wise regulation, for are there not many persons, (for instance the wives and daughters of unbeneficed clergymen, widows, &c. in confined circumstances) who could spare a portion of their time, and whose services would be invaluable, but to whom an annual contribution would be an insurmountable difficulty? Two of the ladies who are the present visitors, happen to be the wives of Governors, whose families, were it not for this equitable law, could not be of all the service which the exigencies of the institution require, without being burdened by a double subscription.

The writer is much concerned to say that a like spirit of

wisdom does not govern in the councils of the county Hospital, where it was decreed by a small majority at the late quarterly meeting, by an arbitrary interpretation of an antiquated rule, in direct opposition to the earnest wishes of many most respectable Governors, that no lady should in future be eligible as a visitor, who does not annually subscribe two guineas.¹

The writer of the above paper has great pleasure in adding that since it was sent to a friend for insertion in the Pamphleteer, the Trustees of the Leeds Infirmary, with the unanimous approbation of the medical gentlemen who attend there, (many of whom have been long and justly celebrated for their eminent professional talents) have officially appointed a given number of ladies to visit the female wards of that institution. Is it not evident from this recent instance, that the reign of prejudice, on this subject as on many others, is gradually giving way, and that the hope above expressed of the final adoption of an arrangement so useful and important, will in process of time be universally realized?

York, April 24.

¹ A pecuniary subscription of a certain amount is commonly necessary to constitute a Governor or director of a Charity—The reason is obvious; it is a sort of *self choice*, and if any man, by contributing any small sum should in consequence become a Governor, the institution might be thrown into most improper hands. The case of a Visitor is essentially different: *there*, no self choice takes place, but the Governors at large select. Pecuniary contribution is no certain criterion of fitness. The unfettered choice of the Governors is not only a sufficient guard against improper persons being placed in office, but is often absolutely requisite for obtaining suitable visitors of the female sex. Female contributors to any considerable amount must necessarily be few, and to restrain the choice of Visitors to that few, will often render the plan altogether abortive, and in very many cases exclude persons most fit for the office, i. e. females of active habits, who are really conversant in business.

